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ABSTRACT

One of the most common parenting issues faced by families with multiple birth children is that of the dynamics involved in sibling cooperation and competition. This document compiles stories from the Mothers of Twins Club "Notebook" examining the issue of cooperation versus competition. The first story discusses the impact of the twin relationship on sibling rivalry. The second story presents tips for dealing with sibling conflict, while the third story discusses ways to encourage cooperation. The fourth story presents findings of a survey completed by 299 mothers of multiples on competitiveness among multiple siblings, which indicated that older multiples competed for school grades, friends, and parental attention. The fifth article reports on a laboratory study conducted at the University of Chicago on cooperation and competition between identical and fraternal twin pairs and pairs of unrelated twins, or "pseudo-twin pairs" in various problem-solving situations. This study found that 94 percent of identical twin pairs, but only 40 percent of fraternal twin pairs, successfully completed a puzzle within the time allowed, suggesting that identical twin pairs were more cooperative than fraternal twin pairs. Parental encouragement of similarity or dissimilarity was unrelated to puzzle completion. The sixth article summarizes a study examining the similarity of autonomy and sociability in identical and fraternal twin adults. This study found that among identical twins, autonomy, extroversion, independence, and sociotropy were highly correlated. Female identical twins were more alike than male identical twins. (KB)

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CONSIDERING MULTIPLES: Competition & Cooperation
A collection of articles from MOTC's *Notebook*

National Organization of Mothers of Twins Clubs (NOMOTC)

Families with multiple birth children face many different issues in terms of family lifestyles, economics, and heritage. Even so, all families with multiple birth children also share many of the same concerns and challenges. One of the most prevalent commonalities involves the question, "Will today bring cooperation or competition?" Cooperation builds a sense of family unity; while competition, an invaluable asset in the field of sports, often leads to squabbles and hurt feelings in the family setting.

Over the years, stories in MOTC's *Notebook* have examined this issue of cooperation vs. competition. We at NOMOTC hope this compilation of some of those stories can serve to provide some ideas or to offer some insight into the dynamics involved in this continual battle.

Answers/Ideas

Comparing and Competing

Most parents have romanticized and idealized the wonderful times their twins are going to have together. Of all sibling relationships, none is quite so novel as that of twin children. They are a combination that is completely different from any other two siblings.

Whether identical or fraternal, twins have a built-in, ready-made companion — another person whose life experience is shared right from conception itself. Twins generally like and accept each other, and (particularly in the early years) have a relationship with less friction and fighting than do non-twin siblings. If there are other kids in the family, either younger or older, twins are usually less involved with them and content to be with each other.

But all children want to feel unique; all kids are hungry for parental love and approval. With twins, under normal family circumstances, this usually happens automatically. There is a kind of prestige involved in twinship. As a result, whatever the stresses and strains of later years, twins often begin life with a psychological head start — a feeling of being truly special.

Twins also have the experience of consistent sharing. Whereas single children in the birth order have to learn to share with their siblings, this comes naturally to twins. From the moment of birth, they will share parents and parental security. Later, as they grow, they will share the same problems of childhood and can face the world as a team. This intimate relationship, plus the

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uniqueness of their status, gives twins an added level of strength, but it isn't an unmixed blessing. Being in a close sibling twosome does have its drawbacks as well.

Twins are almost always being compared with each other, not only at home, but in school, at camp, and on the playground and on the street, where total strangers will even join in. However well-meaning it may be, this constant comparison is a form of judgment and can heighten feelings of jealousy and competition. This is especially true of fraternal twins, where there are likely to be greater variations in size, strength and mental ability. Comparison is a burden that most twins learn to live with, but it can be subtly harmful to the young child's developing self-esteem.

Twins and Sibling Rivalry

Young children are like kids everywhere. They have the same need for parental affection, self-esteem, a sense of achievement — also the same stirrings of jealousy and rivalry.

Jud and Robby M. are identical twins, so alike that at first even their parents had a hard time telling them apart. When they were babies and toddlers, their mother dressed them alike; later there were variations — each boy had his own favorite coat, sweater, and so on, and they were encouraged to select different colors. But even when given options, they generally chose similar clothes and enjoyed the same books, toys, television programs, and outdoor activities.

The boys, slight of stature, good-looking, somewhat quiet-mannered, got on well together. There was some fighting and squabbling, but there were no explosions or violent outbursts. Their differences, like their temperaments, were muted. Later in life they made an effort to change their mirror-image appearance. Jud now has a beard. Robby combs his hair in a different style. And each has his own style of dressing. Characteristically, the two young men went into the same profession — film making — and each is having success. Although they work for different companies and are geographically far apart, each one is making almost the same identical progress up the professional ladder!

"We're still close," says Robby, "and I guess we always will be. We talk to each other on the phone a lot, compare notes, exchange news about the industry. It's funny — we've always been rivals, but we've also been supportive of each other. I guess you could say we're 'support rivals.' That's what we are — competitors who give each other a lot of backup."

The concept of "support rivals" symbolizes the sibling relationship between most identical twins. While they still have all the natural competitive drives, their inherent closeness and twin-

sufficiency gives this rivalry a unique underpinning of mutual, wholehearted support.

This is not generally the case for fraternal twins. Here, while pair-bonding is important, each child has distinctive qualities that aren't necessarily matched by the other. Fraternal twins usually do not look alike, nor do they think or act alike. Rivalry between fraternal twins — especially opposite-sex twin pairs — is much like rivalry between any two children in the family. There are the usual battles over toys, clothes, cookies, who gets to pick the television show, and so forth. Because they are twins, they may be expected to share many toys and possessions; but a constant need to share everything can cause anger and intensify the rivalry. So it's important, where possible, to see that each twin has his or her own separate playthings in addition to those that are used jointly.

Between twins, there is another significant variation on the typical themes of sibling rivalry. Since there's no age difference, and the twins will share experiences more or less jointly, there's no envy based on the privileges that accompany childhood age spans. With fraternal twins, both are old enough at the same time to ride a bike, to start nursery school, to stay up later at night and so on. This has a natural leavening influence and tends to reduce friction between these siblings.

The Parent's Role

For parents, the challenge here, as in any sibling situation, is to treat each child in the family as fairly as possible — and as an individual. Experts in child rearing at the Princeton Center for Infancy advise against giving twins cute names that rhyme. Nor, they say, should parents dress these youngsters alike or expect them to share identical toys, friends, and so on....In general, without negating the all-important bond, twins should be encouraged as far as possible to develop their own likes, dislikes, friends, abilities, and interests. Authorities at the Princeton Center for Infancy sum it up simply: "Parents should react to each child as a separate entity and avoid viewing their twins as a set."

Parents of twins also have a special responsibility toward single siblings in the family — to see that they aren't shortchanged when it comes to affection and that their lives aren't overshadowed by the excitement of a multiple birth. Once the immediate fuss and enthusiasm quiet down, attention — in fact, extra attention — can be paid to the other children, who now more than

ever will need to know and feel that they are indeed loved important members of the family circle.

This article is reprinted from MOTC's Notebook, Spring 1990.

Negotiating The Sibl' War

There were once two cats of Killkenney;
Each thought there was one cat too many.
So they fought and they fit,
And they scratched and they bit,
Until instead of two cats - there weren't ANY!

This old nursery rhyme shows that Mother Goose knew something about multiples! With twins or higher order multiples, sibling rivalry takes on a scary dimension: the kids are roughly the same height and weight, they want the same things, and they're together a LOT. Add another sibling or two, and the skirmishes can be a full scale war - Sibl' War.

Here are some ideals to aim for as a way to keep the peace among combatants:

1. **Insist "No Hurting"** — That includes hitting, biting, scratching, pinching, spitting, etc. This is the hardest goal to attain; just about all kids will sooner or later resort to one of these ways to get what they want. You have to firmly state, "No - That hurts" over and over to any action and then do your family's follow-up, such as take a time-out or make the scratcher apologize (often the scratcher has been provoked, so you may want to make the scratchee apologize for her part, although you must stress that it's not right to settle an argument by hurting.) Make an effort to get the kids to empathize with each other. ("Think about how you would feel if your brother bit you...")

2. **Take Preemptive Action** — Really promote getting along! Tell your kids how cooperative they were during mealtime, on an outing, whatever, and how great that made you feel. Celebrate a week (or a day or a three-hour period) of no fights. Talk about how nice your family is. Read books aloud together about how families solve problems, and that goes for any age. Berenstain Bears books are great for babies and younger kids, and your local librarian or bookseller can recommend fiction and non-fiction books that deal with all sorts of adolescent anxiety. Strictly limit television viewing.

3. **Give Kids A Break From Each Other** — This is hard with toddlers and preschoolers, because you almost have to keep them together to prevent damage and injury, but you can establish "nests" with cushy blankets in different corners. Try to get them playing alone in their nests - put on music or give them toys you've put away for awhile. As children get older, you can send them off to different rooms of the house to cool down. Find a moment each day to say a few things to or rock with or tickle each child when it's just the two of you.

4. **Give Them A Chance To Work Off Their Energy** — With the tots, go to the park, the pool, walk around the block, throw a ball in your backyard. In bad weather, walk through the mall or take a class at the Y. You can always do exercise in your living room. Older children can get into sports, which really tire them out. If one or more older kids are not interested in sports, still try to get them to walk, bicycle, jump rope, etc. to keep physically fit (and to tire them out).

We all have days when the kids are just really nasty to each other and you feel pretty nasty yourself. Keep saying to yourself:

"They're just being kids,"
"They're learning to stand up for themselves,"
"This, too, will pass,"
"Tomorrow is another day," etc.

If you can keep them from physically hurting each other, that's a job well done. Remember, you may lose a battle, but you'll eventually win the war.

This article is reprinted from MOTC's Notebook, Fall 1995.

Encouraging Cooperation

While my boys were watching Sesame Street one day, I heard them singing a little jingle about how two can do anything better than one can, and how three can do even better than two. I thought this song must have been made for a mother of multiples.

Cooperation seems to come naturally to twins and triplets. How many times have we heard that what one can't do two (or even three) will find a way to get into? The trick is to find a way to harness and encourage this natural cooperation to the advantages of ourselves and our children. Just think of the wonderful things children can create with little more than a blanket and a few chairs when they cooperate. Picking up toys and chores are done faster and seem easier if we all

work together. The same energy that children use to get into things can also be used to get a job done. Pairing an older child with a younger child might be to the advantage for both children. The younger child feels proud to be doing a "big boy job," while the older child has help and is also given a little responsibility. Children can also team up and help care for the family pet. While one child gets the pet's food, the other child can get fresh water for the animal. The next day the children trade jobs. The child who got the water yesterday gets the food today and so on. The children share the responsibility of taking care of the pet by cooperating in much the same way that mothers and fathers cooperate and share the responsibility of taking care of their children.

A chore chart might be helpful. Having chores listed on a paper can help everyone see what needs to be done. Then decisions can be made as to whether you would like to do the chore by yourself o r if you want to cooperate and share the chore with someone else. The chore might be large enough that it would be better for the entire family to cooperate and do the chore together.

We start learning to cooperate as children when we first share our toys with others. As we get into grade school, cooperation skills continue to grow and become more necessary throughout our school years. As parents,we can model cooperation by using these skills with our spouses, children and others around us. Cooperation is a win/win situation. When having a disagreement, if both parties can cooperate in finding a solution, no one feels as though they have lost the battle.

Cooperation is the first step in teamwork and teamwork can lead to all sorts of wonderful things from being a player on a little league team, to organizing and running a Mothers of Twins Club.

This article is reprinted from MOTC's Notebook Winter 1993.

Research

Competitiveness Seems Unavoidable With Multiples

This survey, which began in October 1993 and ended in March 1994, was written to monitor the degree of competitiveness among multiple siblings. It was completed by 299 mothers of multiples - 247 with multiples 5-years old and younger and 52 with multiples 6-18 years of age. There were eight questions for mothers of multiples 5 years of age and under, and 22 questions for those with multiples aged 6-18. Finally, all mothers answered the same 17 questions.

The age at which competition was first noticed was between six-months and three years of age. This competitiveness caused most mothers to buy them the same toys.

The older multiples competed with each other for school grades, friends and parental attention, and to a lesser degree for clothes, sports, bedroom space and attention from the opposite sex.

CONCLUSIONS:

All multiples are competitive at least part of the time. Being reared together creates a lot of competitive situations - at school, at home, and in many other places. Learning how to handle these dilemmas is a challenge for the multiples and for their parents. The situations must be resolved to everyone's satisfaction, and this requires learning how to give and take in relationships.

The competitiveness of multiples is balanced by their mutual concern and affection for each other. They often act as a team against the outside world. The existence of the other multiple gives each one confidence. My twin sons told me they felt very shy in situations outside the family, but the presence of their twin made it easier to endure a new social experience.

The outside world in this "global economy" is very competitive on many levels from school to jobs to finding a spouse. Learning about competition initially in the home may be helpful to multiples later in life. They should be better able to compete as an individual against others after having been faced from birth with a competitor. Even before they were born, they competed in the womb for space and nourishment!

"Their competitiveness is a positive thing - they learn from each other," one mom remarked.

This article reprinted from MOTC's Notebook June/July 1997.

Cooperation And Competition In Identical And Fraternal Twin Children And Adolescents

Background

This study, conducted by Nancy L. Segal, Ph.D., compares cooperation and

competition between identical and fraternal twin pairs. Unlike most twin studies, which examine the relative behavioral or physical similarity between identical and fraternal twin siblings, this project studies the interaction of pair members in various problem-solving

situations. Identical twins share all their genes in common, while fraternal twins share half their genes in common on average, by descent. Comparing the performance of identical twins working together and fraternal twins working together, therefore may provide some clubs as to the extent to which genetic commonality may influence cooperation or competition.

This project is supported by a National Science Foundation Career Advancement Award to Dr. Nancy Segal. A key aim of this study is to replicate and extend earlier twin research, using a different twin sample. An important extension of this second study is the observation of interaction within pairs of unrelated twins, or "pseudo-twin pairs." pseudo-twin pairs are created by selecting one member from one twin pair and one member from another twin pair and having them work together. It is expected that pseudo-twin pairs composed of identical twins will prove less cooperative than those composed of fraternal twins because of reduced social experience with individuals unlike themselves.

Procedures

PART 1: The first phase of each study was concerned with classification of the twin sample, with respect to twin type, IQ, similarity, hand preference and physical resemblance. All twin pairs and pseudo-twin pairs chosen to participate in the cooperation/competition tasks must obtain similar intelligence test scores. Pseudo-twin pairs are matched for intelligence, sex and age. The first study, conducted at the University of Chicago in 1982, included 105 twin pairs (70 identical and 35 fraternal; 8.04 years of age); the study which is currently ongoing at the University of Minnesota includes 64 twin pairs (29 identical and 35 fraternal; 8.8 years of age). A study of adolescent twins (age 13016 years) is also in progress. At this time, 20 adolescent twin pairs have participated in the study.

PART 2: Cooperation and competition within young twins pairs is observed during joint puzzle completion and doing story construction tasks. These sessions are videotaped and evaluated by independent judges. Forty-seven twin pairs (34 MZ and 13 DZ) in the first study, and forty twin pairs (20 MZ and 20 DZ) in the second study participated. Pseudo-twin pairs engage in similar joint activities. Adolescent twins play an interesting game, call Prisoner's Dilemma, which is very revealing with respect to cooperation and competition within pairs of individuals.

Findings

In the first study, 94% of the identical twin pairs, but only 40% of the fraternal twin pairs,

successfully completed the puzzle within the time allowed. This finding suggests that identical twin pairs are more cooperative than fraternal twin pairs. Various other measures, such as the proportion of time that the puzzle was equally placed between the twins, and type of physical gesturing (passive or aggressive), also suggested more cooperative techniques within identical than fraternal twinships. Several measures (e.g., parental judgment of twin type and parental encouragement toward similarity or dissimilarity) were unrelated to success on the puzzle completion task.

This article is reprinted from MOTC's Notebook, Spring 1990

Identical Twins Exhibit Many Common Personality Traits

This survey was initiated by outside, undergraduate researcher, Barbara Dunn to study the similarity of autonomy and sociability in identical (monozygotic) and fraternal (dizygotic) twins. In all, 38 sets of identical and 31 sets of fraternal adult (18-65) participated.

All subjects completed two psychological questionnaires (the Sociotropy-Autonomy Scale, which measures need for others and the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire). A Physical Resemblance Questionnaire was used to determine zygosity. A total of 160 questionnaires were sent out and 69 were returned. Although this may seem like a low response rate, it is typical for this type of research.

At the center of this study was an examination of identity formation in twins. It has been stated that twins' identity formation is different from identity formation among singletons because twins are frequently thought of as a unit, as in "the twins." So twin children not only need to see themselves as separate from other individuals but from their co-twin as well. Dunn points out that: "The self-concept that a twin has, not only involves their own sense of identity, but a sense of sharing of each other's identities."

Past studies have shown that the personality traits of twins tend to highly correlate, in other words, they are very similar, and Dunn's study supports this. In identical twins, she found the traits of autonomy, extraversion, independence and sociotropy to be highly correlated. So, if one identical twin was very independent, then her co-twin was likely to be very independent, also.

Among fraternal twins only sociotropy, or need for others, was highly correlated.

Dunn also examined gender differences in her study. Among identical male twins, extraversion and sociotropy were highly correlated. Among identical female twins, all of the variables (autonomy, extraversion, independence, sociotropy and solitude) were highly correlated. Among fraternal males and females, only the variable of sociotropy was highly correlated. For all of the traits that were examined, identical twins are more like their co-twin than fraternals and female identical twins were more alike than male identical twins.

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